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ABSTRACT

Significant desired changes occurred in the conference behavior of a group of supervisor-trainees who participated in a microteaching practicum. There was also a significant shift in the way the group evaluated teaching skills; at the end of the practicum their ratings more closely approximated those assigned by a group of experienced supervisors. The fact that significant phenomena were predicted and measured is evidence that the microteaching procedure provides a workable framework for the study of supervisor behavior and its consequences. Additional research is needed to assess other possible effects such as changes in non-verbal conference behavior. (Author/MF)

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MICROTEACHING AS A PRACTICUM FOR SUPERVISOR EDUCATION: THE EFFECT ON SUPERVISOR CONFERENCE BEHAVIOR AND SKILLS

by

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Silberman's Crisis in the Classroom intensifies the pressure for change and improvement in the public school. Those concerned with preparing administrators and supervisors are again reminded of the need for people who can work with classroom teachers on a one-to-one basis in such a way that the teaching-learning situation is improved. Classroom supervisors should maximize the opportunities for professional growth of a teacher according to his individual needs just as the teacher should individualize learning experiences for his students.

Research in the fields of school administration, business management and the behavioral sciences has yielded many understandings about the inter-personal social dynamics involved in situations such as the supervisor-teacher relationship. Unfortunately, this research appears to have made little impact on programs for supervisor education. At best, students are exposed to this information with the hope that it will shape, in a positive way, their subsequent behavior as instructional leaders. Exhortation, however, is a notoriously poor teaching method. Preparation programs should give the potential supervisor an opportunity to function in a meaningful supervisory role so that he can experiment with leadership behavior, evaluate the consequences of his actions, and practice effective strategies.

Videotaped microteaching has been shown to be a useful vehicle for the study of teacher behavior and for developing teaching skills. The purpose of this paper is to report on the results of a project

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which investigated the outcomes of using videotaped microteaching as a tool for preparing supervisors.

Microteaching seemed a logical way to dovetail the teacher education and supervisor education programs in such a way that they would be mutually supportive and each would be stronger. It was thought that, with instruction, graduate students, who were experienced teachers, could effectively serve as supervisors for undergraduates during microteaching cycles, and that the supervisors would benefit from the opportunity to serve in a real supervisory capacity and to view videotape replays of the conferences they held with their undergraduate "teachers." Since microteaching is a contained situation, the supervisors could assess the relationship between their change efforts and subsequent teacher behavior.

Economic factors were also a consideration in the decision to involve supervision students in the microteaching. Capital outlays for equipment, and money for maintenance and repair of equipment, videotapes, and stipends for participating high school students constituted a considerable expense. If the microteaching project could simultaneously serve both graduate and undergraduate programs, these expenses could be better justified.

Questionnaires were administered periodically to both graduate students (supervisors) and undergraduates (teachers) in three practicums conducted prior to this study to obtain their reactions to this training procedure. Both groups strongly endorsed its worth, saying that the microteaching activities were of much more value than an

equivalent amount of time spent in a lecture-discussion course. The supervisors believed that participation in the microteaching practicum caused favorable changes in their conference behavior and evaluation skills. They also felt that they developed a more positive attitude toward classroom supervision and a better understanding of the supervisory role. A six month follow-up on one group of supervisors indicated even stronger positive feelings about the benefits of the practicum.[1]

The limitations of using participant questionnaires as a means of assessing training effects were recognized. A better criterion of effectiveness for this practicum was the degree to which it altered, in desirable ways, the teaching behavior of the teachers and the conference behavior of supervisors. The latter was investigated and reported here.

Problem and Hypotheses

The primary purpose of this study was to determine whether significant changes occur in the conference behavior of supervisor-trainees who participated in this microteaching practicum. The study was also concerned with changes occurring during the practicum relative to two other phenomena: (1) the relationship between conference dialogues and changes in the classroom behavior of teachers, and (2) the extent to which supervisor ratings of specific teaching skills agreed with expert ratings.

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[1] B. Jean Reischman, "An Investigation of Reactions to Microteaching Relating to Supervisory Conference Behavior," (Unpublished Master's Degree research problem, The University of Akron, 1969), pp. 41-42.

The following hypotheses were investigated: supervisors will shift from a direct to a more indirect conference style; a greater proportion of conference talking will be teacher talk; supervisors will offer fewer direct suggestions; supervisors will make greater verbal use of teacher ideas; supervisors will give more verbal support; supervisors will offer less negative criticism; there will be fewer defensive responses by teachers following supervisor questions, suggestions, and opinions; supervisors will make greater use of a conference summary to establish agreement on changes for the reteach; there will be greater agreement between supervisor ratings and expert ratings of teaching skills.

Description of the Practicum

The practicum which provided the data for this study was conducted during the first five week summer session of 1969 at The University of Akron. During the first week, the supervision class met each morning for two hours in a regular class setting. For the remaining four weeks, microteaching training was conducted on Monday and Wednesday mornings during a four-hour time block, and the class met on a regular basis the other three mornings.

Regular class meetings were, in the main, devoted to topics normally treated in an introductory general supervision course (e.g., evolving concepts of supervision, tasks and functions of the supervisor, technical skills of supervisors). During the first week, however, extensive consideration was given to the supervisor-teacher conference which normally follows a classroom observation. Three kinds of

supervisor influence were described: direct, indirect, and non-direct. Direct influence was defined as supervisor behavior which tends to limit or restrict the teacher's freedom to express ideas and feelings. Giving information, giving opinions, and giving suggestions were classified as direct behaviors.

Indirect influence was defined as behavior which encourages teacher expression of ideas and feelings. Asking for information, asking for suggestions, and asking for opinions were considered as indirect behaviors.

Non-direct influence was distinguished from indirect influence in terms of control. It was explained how the supervisor can use questioning technique to control the tone and direction of the dialogue. Non-direct influence was described as supervisor behavior which encourages teacher expression of ideas and feeling without exercising control over the content of the dialogue. Accepting and reflecting teacher ideas and feelings were considered as non-direct behaviors.

Experience with other practicum groups had indicated that novice supervisors tended to use direct influence quite naturally and with comparative ease. The group was asked to use the microteaching conferences to experiment to develop the facility for using indirect and non-direct influence.

Prior to the first microteaching conference, the supervisors viewed and discussed videotaped models of three supervisor-teacher conferences. In the first recording the supervisor's behavior was highly directive.

In the other two tapes, supervisors were shown emphasizing indirect and non-direct behaviors, respectively. None of these models were offered as prescriptions for an ideal supervisory conference style. The group discussion of these models involved a consideration of conditions under which it might be desirable for the supervisor to emphasize each of these three kinds of conference behavior. This discussion did, however, lead to the conclusion that in most situations an indirect-supportive approach appeared to offer the greatest probability that the conference would have a beneficial effect on instruction.

In addition to the regular meetings of the supervision class, microteaching training was conducted on eight mornings, four hours each morning. During each four-hour time block, four videotaping-teaching stations operated simultaneously. Each station was a classroom equipped with a videotape recorder and playback unit. Assigned to each station were three to five secondary students, one undergraduate "teacher," and two graduate students. One graduate student served as the supervisor and the other operated the television equipment. Four teachers and eight graduate students worked sequentially in a station during each four-hour block of time.

The microteaching activities in each station followed the sequence below:

1. Teach.--The teacher presents a brief lesson utilizing a pre-identified teaching skill.

2. First Critique.--The supervisor and teacher view the videotape replay of the teach and have a conference.

3. Reteach.--After a short period of time for reorganizing, the teacher presents the same lesson to a different group of students.

4. Second Critique.--The supervisor and the teacher view the replay of the reteach and confer again.

The stated goal of the conferences was to help the teachers improve their microteaching lessons. Teachers and supervisors had the freedom to discuss any matter relating to an understanding of the teaching-learning process, but were instructed to give specific consideration to the teaching skill which was the focus of the day's microteaching lessons. Each morning, one of the following teaching skills was emphasized: (1) variation of stimulus, (2) set induction, (3) reinforcement, (4) use of audio-visual aids, (5) making assignments, (6) probing, (7) using verbal examples and illustrations, and (8) closure.

All first critique conferences were recorded on videotape and then replayed so that each supervisor could study his own conference behavior. In addition, one conference conducted by each supervisor was replayed and then discussed by the supervisor and a group of his peers from the supervision class. The discussions included clarifying and explanatory remarks by the supervisor, identification of effective strategies and behaviors, speculation on possible outcomes of alternate approaches, and one or two suggestions for improvement.

Design of the Study

The study employed pre and post measurements to assess changes that occurred during the practicum relative to these kinds of

phenomena:

1. the verbal conference behavior of the supervisors and teachers

2. the relationship between first critique dialogues and changes incorporated in reteach lessons

3. the extent to which supervisor ratings of specific teaching skills agreed with expert ratings.

Seven hypotheses were concerned with verbal conference behavior. The first and last conferences conducted by each supervisor were analyzed using Blumberg's category system. A matrix was constructed for each conference and measures or indices relating to each of the hypotheses were derived from the matrix. For each supervisor, the corresponding measures from the first and last conferences were arranged to form matched pairs. The Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed-Rank Test was used to test the significance of shifts in the index numbers for the group of thirty-two supervisors.[2] Mean indices were computed for the thirty-two initial conferences and also for the thirty-two final conferences.

One hypothesis was concerned with the number of changes discussed in the first critique which were incorporated in the reteach lesson by the teacher. Videotapes of the first and last first-critique conferences conducted by each supervisor were examined to determine the nature of all the suggestions made by either the teacher or supervisor.

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[2]Sidney Siegel, Nonparametric Statistics for the Behavioral Sciences (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1956), pp. 75-81.

A written description of each suggested change was recorded by an observer who then compared the videotapes of the teach and reteach to determine which suggested changes were actually instituted in the reteach. The total number of changes actually instituted was divided by the total number of changes suggested. For each supervisor, the proportion of changes actually implemented from the initial conference was matched with the implementation rate for the final conference. The Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed-Rank Test was used to test the significance of the shift in the implementation rate for the group as a whole.

One hypothesis dealt with the number of changes suggested by the supervisor. The number of changes suggested by each supervisor in his first conference was matched with the number suggested in the final conference. The Wilcoxon Test of significance was applied.

The last hypothesis tested the assumption that supervisors would become more proficient in rating the teaching skills that were the focus of the microteaching instruction. At the beginning of the practicum the supervisors rated three of six videotaped examples of microteaching which had been rated by a panel of experts. At the conclusion of the practicum they rated the other three. The percentage of supervisor-expert agreement was calculated for each of thirty-four subscales on the rating forms. Pre and post percentage agreement scores for each of the subscales were then matched. Wilcoxon's test of significance was then applied.

Summary of Results

As a group, the supervisors shifted from a direct to a more indirect conference style. At the beginning of the practicum, supervisors exhibited twice as much direct behavior (giving information, opinions and suggestions) as indirect behavior (asking for information, opinions and suggestions). At the end of the practicum, however, the amount of indirect behavior equaled the amount of direct behavior. Two other indications of this shift in style were that supervisors made greater use of teacher ideas and offered fewer direct suggestions.

As expected, this shift in supervisor conference style was accompanied by greater participation in the conference by teachers. The proportion of conference talking done by the teacher rose from 31 to 38 per cent. It cannot be said, however, that this identifies a causal relationship. The increase in teacher talk may have occurred for other reasons, i.e., the teachers may have felt less threatened by the television camera at the end of the practicum.

At the conclusion of the practicum the supervisors were offering negative criticism less frequently than they were at the beginning. They did not, however, offer more verbal support in the form of praise, encouragement, or other remarks designed to reduce tension. No support was found for the expectation that there would be less defensive behavior on the part of teachers. Teacher defensiveness rarely occurred in either the first or last observations.

Two hypotheses not accepted were that: (1) supervisors would make greater use of a conference summary to establish agreement for

changes in the reteach, and (2) a greater proportion of the changes discussed in the conference would be incorporated in the reteach. For both of these hypotheses there were noticeable shifts in the predicted directions but the changes were not statistically significant.

The last finding had to do with the way the supervisors rated certain teaching skills. There was significantly greater agreement between supervisor ratings and expert ratings at the end of the practicum than at the beginning.

Limitations

Perhaps the most severe limitation of this study was that it focused on immediate outcomes. The "post" measurements actually took place before the end of the practicum. The measured changes, therefore, were detected in situations which were somewhat "unreal" as compared to the normal supervisory setting. Participants were aware that they were being videotaped, and that some of the videotapes would be viewed by the instructor who would assign a course grade. Even though the grades in the supervision course were not based on the conference performance of supervisors, it is probable that the behavior of some of the supervisors was affected by their desire to "do well" in the eyes of the instructor. This is one of the reasons that almost all of the instruction dealing with the conduct of conferences was presented before the first microteaching activities took place. If perceived instructor expectation was a determinant of the conference behavior of graduate students, this order of presentation hopefully maximized the probability that this determinant was equally operative in first and final observations.

Another ramification of the study of immediate outcomes is that they are not necessarily predictive of long range behavior. Conversely, it is quite possible that this training produced long range effects that were not measurable immediately following the practicum.

A second limitation was that the study of conference behavior was confined to a consideration of verbal behavior. Non-verbal cues are an important means of communication between two people in a conference setting.[3] It is assumed, however, that verbal communication is an adequate sample of total behavior.[4]

A third limitation was the lack of published information regarding the use of Blumberg's system for classifying supervisor-teacher interaction. The validity and reliability of the data generated from this system were totally dependent on the ability of the observer to accurately and consistently match observed behavior with the descriptions of behavior contained in Blumberg's categories.

A final limitation was that agreement on the use of the teaching skill rating scales was broadly defined. Any conclusions regarding the reliability of the scales as a device to measure teacher behavior would be extremely tenuous.

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[3]Andrew W. Halpin, Theory and Research in Administration (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1966), pp. 147-63.

[4]Edmund J. Amidon and Ned A. Flanders, The Role of the Teacher in the Classroom (Minneapolis: Paul S. Amidon and Associates, Inc., 1963), p. 5.

Conclusions

Significant, desired changes occurred in the conference behavior of the group of supervisor-trainees who participated in the microteaching practicum. There was also a significant shift in the way the group evaluated teaching skills: at the end of the practicum their ratings more closely approximated thos assigned by a group of experienced supervisors.

These findings suggest that the microteaching practicum which was the focus of this study can serve three important functions relative to supervisor education:

1. To provide realistic pre-service supervisory experience for potential supervisors.

2. To modify the conference behavior of potential supervisors.

3. To accumulate new knowledge and test current theories concerning the process of supervision.

The effectiveness of this microteaching practicum as a training vehicle is thought to be related, in part, to four characteristics of this kind of training which differ from traditional classroom instruction:

1. The learner was more actively involved--rather than just hearing, reading, and talking about supervision, the trainee functioned in a real supervisory role.

2. The learner received immediate feedback--during conferences, the trainee received feedback on his behavior from the other member of the dyad. The videotape replay of the conference presented the trainee with an audio and video reproduction of his conference behavior. The

reteach phase offered immediate feedback on the effectiveness of the trainee's efforts to influence the classroom behavior of the teacher.

3. Additional motivating forces were present--the natural fascination involved in seeing one's self in action on television appears to be intrinsically motivating. The teacher'trainees appeared to accept the supervisory role of the graduate students quite readily. The graduate students seemed to have a desire to meet the role expectations established for them by the undergraduates. Probably another motivating factor was that the performance of each trainee was witnessed by some of his peers.

4. The situation provided for intuitive-discovery learning--the trainees were encouraged to experiment with different techniques and behaviors. The feedback provisions rendered information concerning the consequences of this experimentation.

In this study was concerned with assessing the outcomes of using microteaching as a means to provide pre-service training for supervisors. Additional research is needed to test the findings of this study and to assess other possible effects such as changes in non-verbal conference behavior.

The fact that significant phenomena were predicted and measured is evidence that the microteaching procedure provides a workable framework for the study of supervisor behavior and its consequences. To the extent that the supervisor-teacher interactions which occur in a microteaching setting approximate the supervisory process which occurs in schools, microteaching can be used as a research tool to accumulate and verify knowledge about the processes of educational supervision. (Author/MF)

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